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ABSTRACT

The linguistic bases for bilingual education (i.e, the nature of language, the structures of the native and target languages in a bilingual education program, and the way the two language systems interact) need to be examined and understood as a sound basis for administrative and pedagogical decisions and procedures in the programs. Linguistics is relevant to bilingual education in these ways: (1) it helps in accepting the child for what he is, by recognizing and accepting his linguistic patterns as they may differ from the teacher's, building on his linguistic strengths, and knowing what his language system is; (2) it aids in curriculum planning and the selection and sequencing of instructional materials, and in the selection of what subjects should be taught in what languages of instruction, to maximize transfer of skills; and (3) it is relevant in evaluating and adapting tests, which often reflect the linguistic bias of their creators and need to be adapted to local differences instead of being applied uniformly and unreflectively. (MSE)

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LINGUISTIC BASES FOR BILINGUAL EDUCATION

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LINGUISTIC BASES FOR BILINGUAL EDUCATION

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In bilingual education, more critically than in any other type of educational enterprise, administrative and pedagogical decisions and procedures need to be based on a sound understanding of the wide variety of linguistic, social, psychological, and cultural factors affecting students.

My purpose in this paper is to discuss the linguistic bases for bilingual education: the nature of language, the structures of the native and target languages in a bilingual education program, and the way the two language systems interact. In other words, the ling in bilingual.

We must consider the nature of language in order to know what it is a child is learning when he acquires one or more of them. While phonology (the sound system), grammar (the way words are put together), and vocabulary are usually listed as the three basic components of language, we need a much deeper understanding of language nature and use.

1. Language is systematic. Languages consist of recurrent elements that occur in regular patterns of relationships. Each variety (or dialect) of a language is a slightly different system, but all languages and all dialects are equally regular. The vast majority of sentences used have not been memorized, but are created according to a system of rules the speaker is usually

unconscious of using--or of even knowing--if he acquired the language as a young child. New sentences are understandable because we understand the principles (the system) by which words are combined to express meanings. This means that children do not and cannot learn any language by "mim-mem" drills (mimicry and memorization). Although sometimes called the "linguistic method," this pedagogical procedure would not be supported by many linguists today.

2. Language is symbolic. It is a type of code. Experience is encoded by the speaker, transmitted by speech, and decoded by the hearer. There is no resemblance between the four-legged animal that eats hay and the spoken symbols (hors) or the written horse which we use to represent it in English.

No sequences of sounds or letters inherently possess meaning. The meaning of symbols in a language comes through the agreement of a group of speakers. English speakers agree that the hay-eating animal will be called horse; Spanish speakers, caballo; German, pferd; Chinese, ma; Turks, at; and Navajos, łį́į́'.

We sometimes feel that onomatopoetic words do possess meaning in themselves and are not arbitrary symbols, but the bow-wow of an English-speaking dog is amh-amh in Irish, av-av in Serbo-Croatian, and wang-wang in Chinese. It makes no difference whether the dog is an Irish setter or a Pekinese. Kindergarten and primary teachers know that children must be taught the terms for animals noises when they teach "Old MacDonald Had a Farm." Children realistically imitate animals they have heard before. They learn oink, neigh, or the conventional terms in any language.

3. Languages change. The process of change is slow but inevitable unless all of the speakers of the language are dead. Misguided efforts to "preserve" the language forms of today or yesterday are futile and unfounded. This is not what we mean by "language maintenance."

4. Language is social. The nature and form of each language reflects the social requirements of the society that uses it, and there is no standard for judging the effectiveness of a language other than to estimate its success in achieving the social tasks that are demanded of it. Although the capacity for language is inherent in the neurological make-up of every individual, no one can develop that potential without interaction with others. We use language to communicate, to categorize and to catalogue the objects, events and processes of human experience. We might well define language as "the expressive dimension of culture."

It follows that a person who functions in more than one cultural context will communicate more effectively if he has access to more than one language or dialect.

5. Language is variable. Every person has unique linguistic experiences and speaks in a slightly different way from anyone else. This unique individual speech pattern is called an idiolect. The idiolects of a group of people who are in frequent communication from childhood on will be very similar and will differ from the idiolects of other groups of speakers with whom they have little contact. A group of similar idiolects that differs from others in some aspects of pronunciation, grammar, or vocabulary is called a dialect. Groups of similar dialects compose a language. All

languages have dialects, and every speaker of a language is a speaker of a dialect of that language.

Dialects develop as changes in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary develop in the speech of people who are geographically or socially separated from one another. Linguistic divergence is normally a cumulative process, with small initial differences becoming marked variations if the groups remain separated.

Many dialectal differences begin as differences between the speech of adults and children. Most are "corrected" to some extent, either directly or by adult example. In almost all respects, children speak the language of their parents. As children come together in playgrounds, however, peer group pressure and the prestige of individuals in the group lead to the emergence of group norms of usage. Groups of children who are isolated from one another by distance or social barriers will often develop slightly different linguistic systems. This is one of the basic agents of change in language.

To illustrate regional differences in vocabulary and pronunciation, a child who learns to speak English in Boston, Massachusetts, will carry water in a pail; but a child learning English in Austin, Texas, will use a bucket. A child learning English in most of the southern United States will not distinguish between pin and pen, but will pronounce cot and caught differently; a child in California will distinguish between pin and pen, but not cot and caught. A host of similar lexical and phonological examples can be found, but almost no grammatical differences in

English have regional distribution.

Not all Spanish-speaking children have the same language system, any more than all English-speaking children do, not even all those who live in the United States. Many have come with their families from Cuba, Puerto Rico, or various parts of Mexico or South America. Many others are members of families who have lived for generations in parts of the United States where regional forms of Spanish have continued to develop and change. All of these regional dialects have, as has English, stratified social dialects, creating the kind of complex language diversity that inevitably accompanies the geographical and social dispersion of its speakers.

Extensive differences are also to be found between the French of children in Louisiana and Maine, the Polish of children in Texas and Massachusetts, and the Chinese of children in California and New York, or even of San Francisco and Seattle. Dialectal differences in these languages, as well as in English, reflect both geographic and social distances between groups

Linguists believe that no dialect is inherently better than any other. Judgments on the relative "value" of different dialects are made for social, economic, and political reasons and have nothing to do with the linguistic qualities of the dialects themselves. The dialects of upper-class, educated speakers come to be judged "standard" in most literate societies and are used as the basis for written language, while the dialects of less prestigious speakers come to be considered "nonstandard."

I am emphasizing this aspect of language because the recognition and acceptance of linguistic diversity is critical in educational programs. Any approach that stigmatizes a child's speech (or that of the family) will probably humiliate the child and will certainly create an environment that is not conducive to learning.

Recognition of linguistic diversity has important implications for educational testing. In the cooperative reading projects of 1964-65, for instance, the Habilidad General was required as a test of intelligence for all Spanish-speaking populations in the studies in California, Colorado, and Texas. The Habilidad General was normed in Puerto Rico, and even the college-age testers in the California project who were native Spanish speakers did not know several of the vocabulary items being required of the young children. Data collected with such instruments in regions or with groups other than those for which they are normed are quite unreliable.

There are additional important implications for later education since the child's own dialect of the native language may affect the nature of the problems that child will have in learning such secondary linguistic skills as reading and spelling, as well as the specific problems he/she will have in learning English as a second language.

For the last thirty years, most linguists have been approaching the topic of the interaction of languages in education from a "contrastive" point of view. That is, they first compare the native

language of the students with the second language of instruction in order to describe the structural differences between them, predict which elements of the second language will be most troublesome for students from a particular language background, and then order these troublesome elements for systematic and efficient instruction. Techniques and models for such contrastive analyses differ widely today, and even greater divergence can be expected as more aspects of current linguistic theory are incorporated into language-teaching contexts.

The contrastive approach tries to identify and account for the ways in which the speech patterns of a student's native language interference with acquisition of the speech patterns of a second language. Where patterns in the two languages are similar, a student should have little interference from the native language and find those elements of the second language relatively easy to learn. Where patterns are completely dissimilar, the new element may not be perceived accurately and the closest native language form used in its place. Where patterns are partially similar, as words that have similar form but different meanings (Spanish asistir and English assist), even greater interference might be predicted for the learner.

The value of the contrastive approach in identifying interference phenomena has been debated recently by many linguists. Interference does not always occur where it is predicted; unpredictable problems appear, and a knowledge of the language structures must be supplemented, at least by a perceptive teacher. It seems that the teacher's perception can be greatly aided,

however, by knowing what kinds of difficulties the students are likely to have--and why. Such predictive information also assists in the advance planning, selection, and preparation of materials, and in the construction of efficient tests for native speakers of different languages.

One area of inter-lingistic interference is grammar. The grammatical system of a language includes all of the formal features that express meaning or the relationships of elements in sentences. The grammar of one language is different from that of any other, although some closely related languages have many types of structures in common. English and Spanish will share many more grammatical features than English and Navajo, because English and Spanish descend from a common ancestral language, whereas English and Navajo do not.

Grammar involves such features as word order, which is important in many languages. This can be shown in the following sentences where there is no change in the words themselves, but the difference in the relative order changes the total meaning of the sentence:

The boy hit the man.	The man hit the boy.
We have a guest house.	We have a house guest.
Es mi amigo antiguo.	Es mi antiguo amigo.

The contrast between the word order of Spanish and English may be seen in this example:

Es un hombre.	He is a man.

Such contrast in word order explains why some speakers of Spanish, when learning English, produce such sentences as Is a man following

the Spanish sentence pattern. The carry-over of English word order to Spanish explains such constructions as mi papá's carro for el carro de mi papá.

Other common points of potential grammatical interference are prepositions, pronouns, and agreement of subject and verb--or adjective.

A typical example of phonological interference in English for speakers of Spanish is the sh:ch distinction, as in share vs. chair. At this point in time, however, the most interesting questions on this topic are about the importance of such "mistakes" or whether they really constitute interference at all.

In the past, a great deal of emphasis has been placed on the accurate pronunciation of a second language, and instructional priority has frequently been given to hour after hour of often meaningless repetition drills in the hope of reaching this goal. It was maintained that complete mastery of the sound system was essential. Vocabulary acquisition was deemed less important.

This priority cannot be justified by the realities of communication or by student needs, at least in English as a second language. English tolerates a great deal of variety in pronunciation while remaining intelligible, undoubtedly in part because of its high degree of redundancy. There are few, if any, pairs of words distinguished only by sh or ch that would be misunderstood in context; and the infrequent pairs that might occur in the same place in a sentence (as pin and pen, which are homophones for many English speakers), are clarified by further modification (as in Give me a stick pin vs. Give me an ink pen).

The relative importance of accurate pronunciation in any language must be judged by social criteria as well as intelligibility, however, because pronunciation is probably the most obvious clue to social group membership. Both speakers and listeners often attach strong feelings to the information it may convey.

A foreign "accent" may be prestigious (if it is French, Hungarian, or symbolic of another group we hold in high regard), but it has historically been a handicap to members of ethnic minorities in the United States because it has been used consciously or unconsciously as a vehicle of prejudice. Although we can see a trend toward more tolerance of linguistic diversity, particularly with the spread of bilingual education, it is clear that such biases still exist.

Cultural identity may also be at stake for the speaker as well as the perceiver and must also be taken into account. A person who wishes to retain his native cultural identity and not identify with an English-speaking social group has no reason to "perfect" his English pronunciation. He may, in fact, have good reason not to.

As for the third major area of language, developing vocabulary in the languages of instruction deserves far more attention than it has traditionally been given in language teaching. This area, too, is subject to bilingual interference.

Every word in a language has one or more meanings that can be looked up in a dictionary, but we must understand a great deal more than that to know the meaning of what someone actually says. To

begin with, we must understand the cultural referents that words reflect in each language, how such referents are categorized, and even the patterns of thought such linguistic organization represents. An English speaker is used to thinking of feet, back and neck as belonging to all animate creatures, as well as to some inanimate objects such as chairs. When learning Spanish, he must learn to consider animals in a different category from humans, with patas, lomo and pescuezo instead of pies, espalda and cuello.

Gestures, intonation, and even facial expressions that accompany language are very important to understanding what someone says; and these, too, are different in different language communities.

The normal voice level in English may be interpreted as anger by a child from another language background, and his respectful aversion of his eyes may be interpreted as "shyness" or "sneakiness" by the English speaker.

The question of what contributes to meaning is of considerable current interest to linguistic theoreticians, and much of what they have to say is relevant to those concerned with language learning. The meaning of what is said, for instance, is largely dependent on what is not said, on what is presupposed or implied. Normally, when someone asks a question like, "How many brothers do you have?," the speaker presupposes that the hearer has some brothers, and the hearer may presuppose that the speaker doesn't know how many. But an adult may ask a child, "How many eyes do you have?" when it is quite obvious to both that the adult already knows the answer. Such

violations of the normal rules of language use are quite common when middle-class adults talk to children and may partially explain why lower-class children often do not respond well to such test items.

Because misunderstandings at this level of interpretation are seldom vocalized, we often fail to recognize them. We can be sure, however, that problems are common across languages, between generations, and among different ethnic and socio-economic groups.

At this point, we might wish to ask the question, "So what? What do these linguistic bases have to do with bilingual classroom practices?" In conclusion, I would like to answer that question with a few specific examples.

1. Linguistics is relevant to implementing the oft-repeated dictum in education--accept the child for what he is.
   a. This means recognizing the child's linguistic patterns and how they differ from the teacher's, and knowing also that such differences should not be interpreted as in any way indicative of inferior intelligence or ability.
   b. Accepting the child means accepting his language and knowing how to build on his linguistic strengths rather than interpreting them as indications of deficiency--in need of remedial help or eradication.
   c. Beginning instruction in the language of the child requires knowing what that language system is.

2. Linguistics is relevant to curriculum planning and to the selection and sequencing of instructional materials.
   a. It is relevant to selecting what subjects should be taught in what language. Perceptive scheduling and methodology can maximize positive transfer between skills in the two languages and minimize interference.
   b. Teachers and administrators should evaluate the appropriateness of materials developed in another region or for other social groups.
3. Linguistics is relevant in evaluating and adapting tests.
   a. Tests often reflect the linguistic bias of their makers and often need to be adapted to local differences instead of being applied uniformly and unreflectively.
   b. Merely having tests in the "native language of the child" is no guarantee against linguistic bias given the nature of language and its diversity.

Linguistics is relevant to bilingual education. Now that we are getting away from the very narrow perspective we had of language in the '50's and '60's, linguists can make a greater and more forceful contribution than in the past.